

THE DEATH OF CHIRON: FINDING PEACE IN ASSISTED SUICIDE

BY EMILY KRAUSE, ANGELO STATE UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM, DR. MARK JACKSON, RESEARCH MENTOR, DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND MODERN LANGUAGES

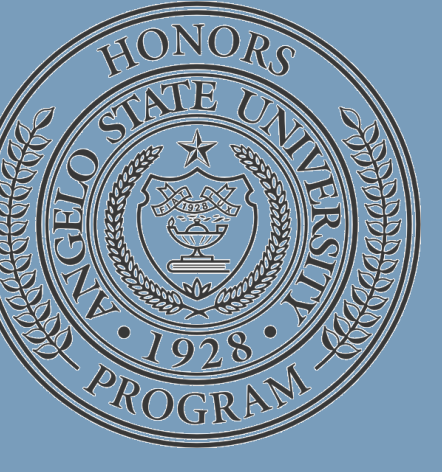
INTRODUCTION AND HYPOTHESIS

Even after three millennia, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* continue to pervade modern society.

These works and many other facets of Greek mythology continue to inspire historians, writers, translators, artists, filmmakers and educators.

If Greek mythology has such a widespread influence, then modern society can continue to learn from the myths or use them to draw parallels to current issues. Chiron's tale is one example of how we can use myths to understand present-day issues.

His death relates to the debate of assisted suicide.



FACTS ABOUT CHIRON

Birth and early childhood:

- His parents are Kronos and Philyra, thus he was immortal.
- He was raised and trained by Artemis and Apollo, who taught him about hunting and medicine.
- He is the only Centaur who married.

Centauiromachy:

- The Centaurs born from Nephele and Ixion were placed in the care of Chiron.
- Pirithous held a wedding banquet and invited the Centaurs, who got drunk and destroyed the wedding hall and raped the bride.
- The Lapiths and the Centaurs waged war. Chiron was not a part of it.

Students:

- Asclepius: medicine
- Actaeon: hunting
- Jason: combat
- Achilles: combat, medicine, and lyre
- Others:
 - Ajax, Aristaeus,
 - Caenus, Herakles,
 - Medus, Patroclus,
 - Peleus, Perseus,
 - Theseus

Beings Helped:

- Peleus: Saved him from Centaurs, returned his sword after Acastus tricked Peleus, and helped him marry Thetis.
- Actaeon's hunting dogs: Calmed them after Actaeon's death.
- Phoenix: Cured his blindness.

Death:

- Herakles had chased frenzied Centaurs to Chiron's cave.
- Herakles shot a volley of arrows poisoned with the Hydra's blood towards the Centaurs. One of the arrows hit Chiron.
- Because Chiron was immortal, he could not die, but the poison was incurable, leaving him in inescapable and unending pain.
- Chiron then suffered until he exchanged his immortality for the freedom of Prometheus.

ASSISTED SUICIDE

Emotional Effects of PAS:

- According to a structured telephone survey given by E.J. Williams:
 - 53% of physicians were comforted from having helped a patient
 - 24% of physicians regretted participating
 - 16% of physicians reported emotional burden
- According to a mail survey of physicians by D. E. Meier:
 - A quarter of physicians reported being somewhat uncomfortable with their role.
 - < 7% were very uncomfortable with their role.

Nonphysician-Assisted Death:

- Jurors are indicative of public opinion on non-physician assisted death.
- Jurors tend to rate defendants more leniently if the nullification instruction was included in the defense.
- Individuals that commit nontraditional assistance (i.e. shooting) were perceived as guiltier than traditional assistance (i.e. disconnecting life support).

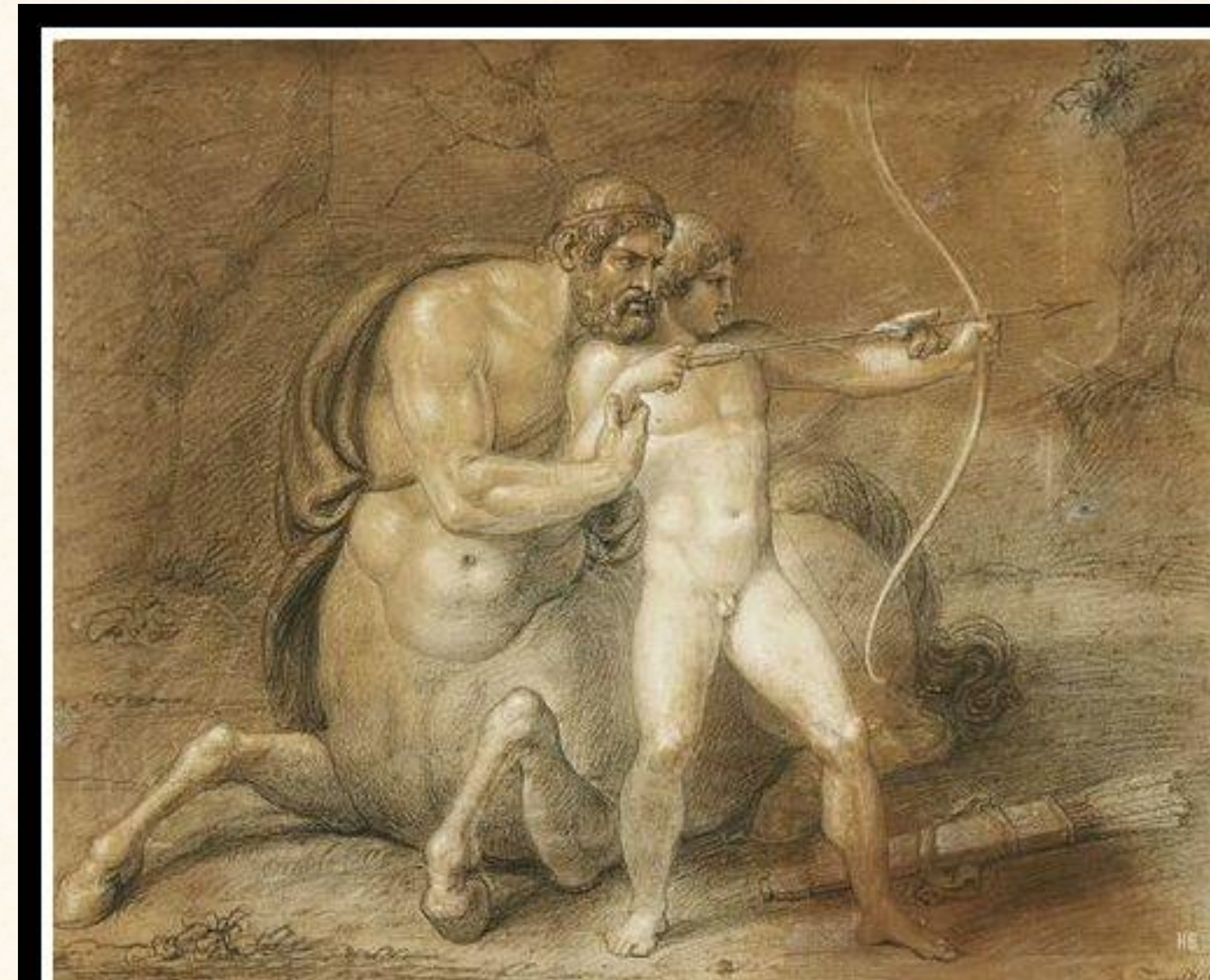


A PANEL FROM THE BASSAE FRIEZE;

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/37/Bassae_Frieze_1077.jpg

Argument for PAS: Moral Justifiability:

- Refers to those whose incurable or irreversible medical condition causes intolerable suffering or loss of independence.
- Two values:
 - The value to individuals of making autonomous choices.
 - The value of promoting their well-being to the individuals who make those decisions.
- Though people argue PAS is against the classical principle of medical ethics, non maleficence, it does not violate the principle of beneficence, distributive justice, and patient autonomy (in the case of patients who are fully present in the decision making).
 - Beneficence: intend good or benefit
 - Distributive justice: treatments equally available to all
 - Patient autonomy: the ability to make one's own decisions



"CHIRON TEACHING ACHILLES"

<https://aquileana.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/centaur18.jpg>

ANALYSIS

- Chiron's death is similar to the issues patients with terminal illnesses face, to suffer or to find peace in death.
 - He has lost movement, therefore he has lost autonomy.
 - He is in constant, debilitating pain.
 - In theory, if Chiron's case were tried, the jury would be informed they had the right to ignore the law because a "guilty" verdict would be unfair.
 - Chiron requested it.
 - It was a benefit to those involved.
 - It prevented further harm to Chiron.
- Achilles represents the opposition to physician-assisted suicide.
 - He views the assisted suicide as simply a way out of life, and not as an end of suffering.
 - He has issues with being involved in Chiron's death.
 - It is documented that he said: "Live, I beg you; don't leave me, dear father!"
- Prometheus is an example of the families that benefit from a patient's assisted suicide.
 - Chiron helped free Prometheus when he gave up his immortality.
 - The patient is not the only one that benefits from finding peace in death.
 - Families of the patient are burdened financially, emotionally, and physically.

CONCLUSION

People can use Greek mythology to relate to modern medical issues. They create an emotional and easy-to-visualize story that helps people understand complex ethical issues. Chiron, the hero trainer's death is a prime example of why assisted suicide is sometimes a viable option, and why it can be viewed as the only option. If Chiron had not been allowed to give up his immortality, he would have continued to be bed-ridden and in crippling pain. He was able to find peace because he found a way to die. In addition, it provides the varying opinions of the secondary members involved.